

4.5. Persons perceived to be opposing the SDF/YPG

Following the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024, this document has been reviewed and updated. Please consult '[Interim Country Guidance: Syria \(2025\)](#)'

COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: February 2023

This profile refers to different groups perceived by the SDF/YPG as opposing them. It includes, in particular, political opponents, persons with perceived links to ISIL (see also [4.3](#)), and persons associated with Türkiye and/or the SNA. In addition, it addresses the situation of Arabs and Christians in Kurdish-controlled areas.

COI summary

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 5, pp. 58-66]

Different profiles of individuals with real or perceived links to a variety of groups or activities can be considered by the SDF/YPG as opposition:

Political opponents and supporters of opposition parties

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 5.1, pp. 58-60, 5.2.1, pp. 60-62]

SDF/YPG operates through the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), an officially unrecognised government entity under the effective control of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the dominant political actor in the Kurdish controlled areas. During the reference period, intra-Kurdish negotiations for power sharing which aimed at unifying the PYD and the Kurdish National Council (KNC) into a single Kurdish political party reportedly made progress towards an agreement, with restrictions on the KNC's political activities relaxed as talks progressed.

Nonetheless, the SDF continued to arbitrarily arrest and detain persons who have links to political parties opposing the PYD or the AANES or criticise their policies. These detainees included political activists, humanitarian workers, civil society activists and media professionals [for information on the treatment of journalists by SDF/YPG, see [4.8. Journalists, other media professionals and human rights activists](#)]. The majority of these individuals were either affiliated to parties within the KNC, including the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), or worked for organisations closely aligned to the KNC. The majority were reportedly released, although in exceptional cases detainees died from torture in prisons. Incidents of targeted attacks on individuals affiliated to the KNC by unknown attackers as well as arson attacks on KNC offices

were also reported.

Persons with perceived links to ISIL

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 3, pp. 49-52]

The treatment of individuals with perceived links to ISIL, including by the SDF/YPG, is addressed in a separate profile [4.3. Persons with perceived links to ISIL](#).

It should also be noted that, while the SDF regularly claims to arrest ISIL affiliates, some of those arrested were reportedly civil activists, including activists involved in the uprising against the Assad government, and humanitarian workers.

Arabs and Christians in areas controlled by SDF

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 5.1, pp. 58-60, 5.2.1, pp. 60-62]

Arabs claimed to be marginalised under the SDF-rule. In Arab-majority areas, protests against SDF rule on issues such as poor services and high prices as well as the SDF's policy of forcibly conscripting, has become a common feature of life since 2017. While one source noted that 'protests generally occurred throughout the north-east without interference from local authorities', it was also reported that arbitrary arrests of protesters as well as violence against civilian protests took place on several occasions, leading on multiple instances to death. Hundreds of people were arrested in various Arab-majority areas controlled by the SDF for forced conscription. Owners of private schools as well as teachers were reportedly arbitrarily arrested over matters about the use of the GoS curriculum.

Concerning the situation of Sunni Arabs in Syria in general, see the profile [4.10.1. Sunni Arabs](#).

In 2018, disputes between the PYD-led Kurdish administration and **Christian** communities over the school curriculum led to the temporary closure of schools in the cities of Qamishli, Hasaka and Al-Malikiyeh. Christian activists complained in protests that the 'mandated curriculum denied them their own unique ethnoreligious identities' and that it aimed to promote Kurdish nationalism. Teachers who refused to fully implement the PYD curriculum were arrested. During relevant protests, demonstrators were also arrested or forcibly disappeared by PYD forces [[Targeting 2020](#), 3.3, p. 43]. Disputes between the Kurdish administration and Christian communities over the school curriculum continued. In September 2021, several students, teachers and members of the Syriac Christian Orthodox Creed Council were arrested, mainly in Hasaka governorate and Ein Arab city in Aleppo governorate, by the SDF after they had criticised and refused to adopt the school curriculum introduced by the AANES [[Targeting 2022](#), 11, pp. 95-97].

Concerning the situation of Christians in Syria in general, see the profile [4.10.5. Christians](#).

Persons associated with Türkiye and/or the SNA

[Main COI reference: [Targeting 2022](#), 5.2.3, pp. 62-64]

During the reference period, it was reported that the SDF and Asayish arrested individuals of various profiles on suspicion of collaboration with the SNA and Turkish forces, including espionage for Turkish intelligence services. More recently, in February 2022, a man and a woman were arrested in the city of Manbij for allegedly 'communicating with ISIS and Turkish forces'. Individuals arrested for alleged espionage on behalf of Turkish intelligence included SDF personnel. Kurdish forces have also reportedly targeted civilians who were relatives of SNA members. There is little information on the treatment of those detained for their

alleged links to Turkish forces. However, it was reported in December 2020 that one person died under torture while in detention.

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. enforced disappearance, torture, arbitrary arrest). When the acts in question are (solely) discriminatory measures, the individual assessment of whether discrimination could amount to persecution should take into account the severity and/or repetitiveness of the acts or whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures.



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: regional specifics (who is in control of the area of origin of the applicant, if the applicant was located in any of the IDP camps), the nature of activities and the degree of involvement in activities perceived by SDF/YPG as opposition, perceived affiliation with ISIL (see separate profile [4.3. Persons with perceived links to ISIL](#) or with Turkish-backed forces (see also [4.1.2. Members of anti-government armed groups](#)), being known to the Kurdish authorities (e.g. previous arrest), etc.



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion.



Exclusion considerations could be relevant to some sub-categories of this profile, such as ISIL members and members of the SNA (see the chapter [8. Exclusion](#)).

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